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ELIJAH, THE GREAT PROPHET REFORMER.

[From Geikie's Hours with the Bible.]

On the prophets rested the hope of the future. The degraded priesthood that had supplanted that of Aaron had entirely lost position and independence. Unfortunately, the times which had tried others put the prophets also to a test which too many of them failed to stand. The fierceness of Jezebel terrified not a few into silence. Many fled to the security of the desert or the hills, and large numbers were won over to an outward conformity to Baal worship, or, at least, to a politic and unworthy complaisance towards power. From Ahab's reign there appear "false prophets;" men who, to get quiet, or honor, or pay, used their high gifts to flatter and serve the great, by prophesying what they fancied would please. Henceforward the pure and noble among the order had to contend, with ever-increasing earnestness, against this corruption and debasement of some of its members, and were too often persecuted by them.

Still, amidst this reign of terror, there were some faithful Abdiels who clung to the religion of their fathers, and among these, but high above them all, towered Elijah, "the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced."

He had the greatness of soul to stand up singly, face to face with the whole power of the kingdom, on behalf of Jehovah. Appearing and disappearing like an apparition, his life depending on his rapid flight after delivering his message, no dangers kept him back from any point where duty demanded his presence. He shows how one man, strong in the support of God and the right, can by fearless courage and absorbing zeal change the whole course of history in his time; resist and overthrow the most crushing tyranny over conscience, and bring in a new victorious epoch. He was an anticipation of Athanasius in his grand attitude of standing "alone against the world," and he was the conqueror in the struggle.

The abruptness of his introduction adds to the interest of his story. Nothing is told us of his parentage or birthplace, beyond the words "Elijah, the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead;" but where Tishbeh was is as yet altogether uncertain. His whole character, however, and his appearance and habits of life, point to his being a Gileadite, though it seems impossible to believe with Graetz that he was not an Israelite, but belonged to one of the old native races. Gilead was a land of chase and pasture, of tent villages and mountain castles; with a population of wandering, half-civilized, fierce shepherds, ready at all times to repel the attacks of the desert tribes, or to go out on a foray against them. Many of these Arab traits are seen in the notices of Elijah. Apparently tall, he must have been sinewy and thin from his simple fare, his hard life, the rapidity of his movements, and his powers of physical endurance. His hair hung long and thick down his back, for he was a Nazarite. It would seem, indeed, that the prophets as a rule took this vow.—His dress was a simple tunic, held round him by a belt of hide, which he tightened when, like a Bedouin, he wished to run for a long distance. Over this he commonly wore, like the peasants of Palestine now, a mantle or cape of sheepskin with the wool on it, or of coarse camel's hair cloth, which, as already noticed, became the special characteristic of prophets. In this mantle he at times hid his face when under strong emotion, and he used it, rolled up like a

staff, to smite the waters of Jordan when about to pass over them. On one occasion we find him bowing himself on the ground, with his face between his knees, perhaps in prayer, though the usual attitude in devotion was to stand.

The immense influence of Elijah during his life is seen in the place he held in the memory of after generations in Israel. He takes rank along with Samuel and Moses; not like the former, as the apostle of a system yet undeveloped; or as the founder of a religion, like the latter; but as the restorer of the old when it was almost driven from the earth. The prophet Malachi portrays him as the announcer of the great and terrible day of Jehovah. His reappearance was constantly expected as the precursor of the Messiah. So continually was he in the thoughts of the people of New Testament times that both John the Baptist and our Lord were supposed to be no other than he. The son of Sirach calls him a fire, and says that his word burned like a torch, and that it was he who was to gather together again the tribes of Israel from the great dispersion. The Jews believe that he appeared often to wise and good Rabbis, generally under the form of an Arab merchant. At the circumcision of Jewish children, a seat is always left vacant for him. After the wine cup of each passover is drunk, the youngest child of a Jewish family opens the door, and all rise and look towards it, thinking that Elijah then enters. His final coming, it is believed, will be three days before that of the Messiah, and on each of the three days he will proclaim peace, happiness, and salvation, in a voice that will be heard over all the earth. So firm, indeed, was the conviction of this in the days of the Talmud, that when goods were found which no owner claimed, the common saying was, Put them by till Elijah comes.

Like every great enthusiastic soul, that of Elijah kindled others by his words and example. He quickened the religious life of the nation, as Samuel had done in his day. Thus, the sect of the Rechabites seems to have owed its origin to him—a body of faithful servants of God collected by Jonadab, the son of Rechab, who retired from the strife and persecution of the times, to worship Jehovah in seclusion from the temptations and trials of the world. The hope of the future, they fancied, lay in a strict return to the simplicity and strictness of the past, and they therefore bound themselves to live in tents. They chose the lonely wilderness of the Southern Jordan for their home; and adopted in their fulness the vows of Nazarites. Abstaining from wine and the grape, they confined themselves for food to the products of the desert, and formally bound themselves to have neither tilled land, nor vineyards, nor fixed dwellings.

But the most striking result of the appearance of Elijah was the impulse he gave to prophetic activity. The communities of sons, or disciples, of the prophets, of which there is no mention from the earlier years of David, appear again in the fullest vigor, cherishing the ancient faith in the calm and seclusion of their settlements. Among these there were not wanting such as Micaiah, to stand up boldly, like Elijah, before the world, for the truth. The honored servant of Elijah, Elisha, the son of Shaphat, especially takes a grand place as the champion of Jehovah, and, after him, generations of his order showed, in their zeal and incorruptible loyalty to God, how deeply the example of the Tishbite had stirred them.

Yet the work of Elijah, with all its glory, was marked by the imperfection of the dispensation to which he belonged. The defender of a national theocracy, he

burst on his age as a minister of judgment against unrighteousness: his sternness like that of the storm; his words lightning and tempest. All his acts show him, like a fire, consuming the ungodly; an embodiment of the avenging justice of Jehovah in an evil day. Glowing zeal, dauntlessness of soul, and unbending severity are his leading traits, though he showed the gentlest sympathy in the relations of private life. As the great and strong wind, and the earthquake and fire, rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks, before Jehovah—the awful precursors of the still small voice, for which they prepared the way—Elijah came to open the path for the kingdom of God, and bring about a state of things in which its gentle message of love could be proclaimed amongst men. He was not so much the foreshadowing image of our Divine Master as a contrast to His Spirit. The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. The wish of His disciples to call down fire from heaven, as Elijah had done, to consume those who refused to receive Him, evoked only a rebuke from Jesus Christ.

♦EDITORIAL NOTES.♦

Renewal.—Now that *one year* has passed since THE HEBREW STUDENT began its work, it is time for many of our subscribers to renew their subscriptions. They will receive in due time blanks, which they are requested to fill out and return. We hope that *all* will feel inclined to do this. The second year in the history of a paper or periodical is perhaps even more critical than the first, and it is natural for us to look forward with some interest to the issue of the undertaking. Although many have suggested that the price be raised, it is to remain at the same rate, *one dollar per year*, in order that no one may feel unable to take it. To furnish the journal at this price, however, it is *necessary* that many new names be added to the list. With so low a subscription price, it is, of course, impossible to offer premiums, or to allow much discount to those who act as agents. We, therefore, ask each one of our subscribers, of whose interest in our success we feel confident, not only to forward promptly his own name for the coming year, but also to secure, if possible, the name of some neighboring minister or teacher, or of some layman who is interested in such studies. It would not be difficult for each one to do this. Is there any reason why he should not do it? *Will he not do it*, and thereby give substantial aid to the cause whose interests the journal is intended to subserve? It need not be said that everything depends upon the interest which our friends exhibit in this matter. If it were the purpose in this work to make it a financial success merely, it would ill become us to ask such a favor, but we ask it because we feel that the undertaking is one which deserves the support of every Christian minister and scholar, and because we know that unless help of this nature is given, and that, too, in large measure, it will be impossible to realize what could reasonably be expected, in the way of improvement and growth. Who will send a list of *twenty* new subscribers? Who will send *ten*? How many will send *at least one*? We believe there are many to whom this appeal will not come in vain.